

Letter to Alexander H. Stephens

The following is the text of a letter from Abraham Lincoln to the future Confederate Vice-President, Alexander Stephens. Lincoln and Stephens had known each other when both were Whig Congressmen in the late 1840's. The complete text of the letter to which Lincoln is replying is apparently not among the Stephens papers.

For your own eye only.

Springfield, Ills.
Dec. 22, 1860

Hon. A. H. Stephens--
My dear Sir

Your obliging answer to my short note is just received, and for which please accept my thanks. I fully appreciate the present peril the country is in, and the weight of responsibility on me.

Do the people of the South really entertain fears that a Republican administration would, directly or indirectly, interfere with their slaves, or with them, about their slaves? If they do, I wish to assure you, as once a friend, and still, I hope, not an enemy, that there is no cause for such fears.

The South would be in no more danger in this respect than it was in the days of Washington. I suppose, however, this does not meet the case. You think slavery is right and should be extended; while we think slavery is wrong and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us. Yours very truly

A. Lincoln

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